Service Quality B.C.

BUSINESS PLAN

'PUTTING THE PUBLIC FIRST'

Province of British Columbia
December 1990

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Province of British Columbia

Office of the Premier

MEMORANDUM

To: All B.C. Public Servants January 11, 1991

From: All Deputy Ministers

Subject: Service Quality B.C. Business Plan

We are pleased to provide each member of the B.C. Public Service with a copy of the Service Quality Business Plan. Service Quality B.C. is an initiative of the Deputy Ministers' Council and you will note this Business Plan is signed off by every Deputy Minister in the public service. Each Deputy Minister recognizes that superior service quality is their responsibility in their individual ministries.

This Business Plan reflects the input which many of you provided during the regional visits that took place last Fall in 15 communities around the Province.

It is obvious that Public Servants throughout British Columbia want to provide the best possible service to the citizens of this Province. We have an excellent base to build upon, but we can do better. This Business Plan is the road map of how we intend to get there.

David Emerson
Deputy Minister to the Premier

Bob Plecas
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Regional and Economic Development, and Chairman, Deputy Ministers' Service Quality Steering Committee

Gary Mullins
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology

Bruce A. Hackett
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Robert A. Edwards, Q.C.
Deputy Attorney General
Ministry of Attorney General

Ed Macgregor
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Crown Lands

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Recycled Paper

for Wayne Desharnais
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Education

Isabel Kelly
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Government
Management Services, and
Minister Responsible for
Women's Programs

John Allan
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Energy, Mines &
Petroleum Resources

Krysia Strawczynski
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health and
Minister Responsible for
Seniors

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Ministry of Environment

Douglas E. Allen
Deputy Minister
Ministry of International
Business & Immigration

Doug Horswill
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Finance and
Corporate Relations

Claude Heywood
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Labour
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Philip Halkett
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Ministry of Forests

Ken MacLeod
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Ministry of Municipal
Affairs, Recreation &
Culture

Eric Denhoff
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Ministry of Native Affairs

Dick Butler
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Social
Services and Housing

Stephen Stackhouse
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Parks

Dennis Murray, Q.C.
Deputy Solicitor General
Ministry of Solicitor
General

Gerry Armstrong
Deputy Provincial Secretary
Ministry of Provincial
Secretary

Vince Collins
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Transportation
and Highways

Eli Sopow
Associate Deputy Minister
Ministry of Provincial
Secretary

Allan Brent
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Tourism

SERVICE QUALITY B.C.
BUSINESS PLAN

"PUTTING THE PUBLIC FIRST"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Service Quality B.C. Business Plan outlines a strategy for focusing on service quality in government. It was prepared in response to the Council of Deputy Ministers' initiative to provide outstanding customer and client service. The plan was jointly prepared by the Task Force on Improved Service to the Public and the Service Quality B.C. Secretariat chairpersons.

It is based on extensive consultations with ministry executive committees, regional line staff and managers, and central agencies. In response, the emphasis in the plan is that service quality must be ministry driven and customer focused within a framework supported by central agencies.

The plan sets as government's goal the achievement of exceptional service quality, characterized by:

- A client/customer service focus
- A balance between the costs of service and resources
- Standards, measurement and analysis
- Empowerment and recognition
- Employee development
- Open communication
- Innovation
- Planning for service quality
- Commitment and leadership

In support of the goal, nine priorities are proposed for government in 1991:

1. Improve Public Access to Government Services
2. Lead with Ministry Initiatives
3. Provide Training Necessary to Improve Service to the Public
4. Increase Delegation of Authority
5. Recognize the Value of Customer Service Skills
6. Make Service Quality Matter
7. Ensure Supportive Personnel Management Policies
8. Build Responsive Central Agencies
9. Monitor Progress

Specific action plans are described for each priority. Deputy Ministers are asked to endorse the business plan and commit the necessary resources to the proposed initiatives.

SERVICE QUALITY B.C.
BUSINESS PLAN

"PUTTING THE PUBLIC FIRST"

BACKGROUND

The Service Quality B.C. Business Plan outlines a strategy for focusing on service quality in government.

- The plan was prepared in response to the Council of Deputy Ministers' initiative to provide outstanding customer and client service.

- In support of the initiative, a Secretariat comprised of seconded senior executives and contract staff was created to provide initial assistance to ministries. A Task Force made up of senior executives was also established to investigate specific impediments to introducing service quality, and make recommendations for improvement. Both groups are guided by a Steering Committee of Deputy Ministers, Crown and private corporation Chief Executive Officers, and experienced line staff.

- The plan was prepared jointly by all Task Force members and the Secretariat chairpersons.

- It is based on extensive consultations with ministry executive committees, regional line staff and managers, and central agencies.

- The focus is on opportunities for improving customer service and reducing structural impediments.

- The principal recommendation is that service quality be ministry-driven and customer-focused within a framework supported by central agencies.

THE VISION - EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality is government's commitment to the public - our customers and clients - that they will receive absolutely **the best service we can provide**. Service which is focused on **their** needs and expectations. Service which is enthusiastic, friendly, flexible, results oriented, affordable, responsive.

Service quality has been adopted by private and public sector organizations across North America - including several in the B.C. public service. Each has its own unique set of customers and clients, operating environment and objectives. But across all these organizations there are common characteristics that make them stand out from their competitors and peers, establishing a standard for ministries and central agencies to work towards. They include:

- A client/customer service focus

  Every individual in the organization is responsive, friendly and results oriented. Service units actively seek to meet customers' needs and expectations and to obtain regular feedback from customers and clients on their satisfaction with the services provided.

- A balance between the costs of service and resources

  Every individual in the organization strives to provide the best service with available resources.

- Standards, measurement and analysis

  Every individual in the organization knows what results they are responsible for. Service standards provide benchmarks that help focus and extend service quality goals. Measurement provides a scorecard that tells individuals and units how close they are to their goals. Analysis provides the information to reach those goals.

- Empowerment and recognition

  Every individual in the organization has the necessary authority and responsibility to make most decisions directly affecting the client/customer. The organization provides an environment that encourages and supports employee involvement in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

- **Employee development**

  All individuals in the organization improve their personal and professional potential for achieving service quality by participating in continuous training and development programs.

- Open communication

  Every individual in the organization respects and values the views of customers, suppliers and fellow employees. Individuals in any part of the organization are encouraged to go directly to any other part or person in the organization for information or assistance in performing their job.

- Innovation

  Every individual in the organization promotes and is supported in the development and implementation of new ideas, processes and products which enhance the quality of service provided to customers and clients.

- Planning for quality service

  Strategic and budgetary plans are designed to achieve long-term service quality results throughout the organization. Every individual knows the organizational vision, mission, values, objectives and expected results and contributes to their development.

- Commitment and leadership

  Management actively supports the commitment to service quality. Every individual in the organization actively develops, encourages and champions service quality. Management systems within the organization support and maintain this process.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY - SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS

The consultations with ministry executive committees and regional line staff and managers in 15 communities across the province highlighted that:

- Management and staff take considerable pride in what they do, and there is a genuine willingness to continuously improve the quality of service they provide.

- Organizations within government have proven that service quality works and makes good business sense.

- More attention needs to be paid across government to finding out what its customers' and clients' needs and expectations are, and on structuring and providing services based on customer feedback.

- Government is not homogenous, requiring flexibility in the delivery of customer and client service. This can be best achieved through ministry-driven initiatives.

- Within the same set of opportunities and constraints, some organizations have made great gains in improving their service quality and operating performance, while others have not.

- Success in implementing service quality is not the result of any mandated requirement, but rather the commitment and enthusiasm of Deputy Ministers and senior executives, supported by their staff.

- Rigidity in financial, personnel and administrative policy and practices is attributable as much to ministry management service groups as it is to government wide central agencies.

There was broad consensus amongst the staff consulted that service would be improved if:

- information about government programs and services was more readily available, simplified, and written in plain English;

- training for managers and staff in program delivery, customer service skills, and leadership was improved;

- processes were simplified, with responsibility and accountability for results delegated to the level directly responsible;

- customer service skills and performance were more highly valued and recognized;

- the structure of government did not segment individual customers across ministries and programs;

- adequate tools to do the job were provided; and

- ministry teamwork and communications were improved and public service more highly valued in the community.

Ministry executive committees emphasized the need for:

- flexibility in the application of financial, personnel and administrative policy and practices based on customer demand, ministry needs and proven ministry performance.

A complete summary of the results of the regional staff visits and executive committee meetings is provided in the Appendix.

ACTION PLAN - NINE PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNMENT

Ideally, all ministries will commit themselves to providing exceptional service quality and make it part of their everyday activity and way of doing business.

As a first step, nine priorities are proposed for government as a whole. Satisfactory achievement of the proposed objectives will:

- eliminate specific impediments to service quality,
- provide an opportunity to fine-tune methodology,
- demonstrate the benefits of service quality, and
- provide a model for continuous improvement.

The emphasis is on ministries, and the actions they can undertake. Success will depend on their willingness to make it happen, and their commitment of resources. As well, Treasury Board's continuing support and approval is required to provide the flexibility which enables ministry service quality initiatives to proceed.

The nine priorities are:

1. Improve Public Access to Government Services

   Government often appears maze-like. For the public trying to obtain information or access to services, it can be a frustrating experience. Government's first objective should be to communicate simply, clearly, and in plain English and deal with customers and clients in a consistent fashion.

2. Lead with Ministry Initiatives

   As a strategy, the plan recommends that ministries build on the "islands of excellence" in their ministry and across government. The plan recommends that ministries, and government as a whole, seek out, endorse and promote ministry initiatives which exemplify the service quality approach.

3. Provide Training Necessary to Improve Service to the Public

Managers and staff are often ill-prepared to deal with the public; new staff often receive little or no ministry orientation; many managers have little experience in providing service quality leadership and experienced staff do not have up-to-date program knowledge.

4. Increase Delegation of Authority

It is recommended that central agencies and ministry central services groups continue their progression from control oriented agencies to value added service providers, in the areas of financial, personnel, administrative and communications management.

In general the financial control agencies, with ministry senior financial officers, should review the materiality of expenditure reviews and approval requirements to determine if they are still appropriate.

Specifically, memoranda of understanding should be negotiated between central agencies and ministries which provide broader scope for independent ministry action within a framework of strict ministry accountability.

Ministries should strive to ensure that every individual in the organization has the necessary authority and responsibility to make most decisions directly affecting the customer/client. Ideally, this will result in a flattened organization with as few as four layers of supervision from the customer/client to the Deputy Minister.

5. Recognize the Value of Customer Service Skills

Earlier this year, a discussion paper was prepared for the Deputy Ministers' Council entitled "Planning for the Future: A Work Force Plan for the 1990's," emphasizing the need for a strategic approach to human resource management. Within that broader framework, a number of specific initiatives related to service quality are recommended in this Service Quality Business Plan.

6. Make Service Quality Matter

Service quality must have senior management's commitment to succeed. It is senior management that is in the position to create and communicate a vision of service quality and make it matter. Most importantly, staff, customers/clients and suppliers pay attention to what senior management does. Management selection, promotion, performance plans, appraisals and contracts must place priority on, and recognize achievement of, service quality results.

7. Ensure Supportive Personnel Management Policies

Personnel management policies must provide managers with the resources and flexibility to meet customer needs and expectations and respond to their changing demands.

8. Build Responsive Central Agencies

Central agencies and Crown corporations which are mandated to provide services available from the private sector must offer a level of service which can pass the market test.

9. Monitor Progress

The Council of Deputy Ministers should be provided with regular progress reports on ministry and central agency achievements as outlined on the following pages. In addition, it would be beneficial if each ministry, over the next year, presented Deputy Ministers' Council with a brief overview of their service quality initiatives and accomplishments.

SERVICE QUALITY B.C.
ACTION PLAN

Project/Priorities	Action	Due Date	Responsible
1. IMPROVE PUBLIC ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT SERVICES			
a) Toll Free Information Line Implement a toll free telephone information line staffed by well-prepared, superior customer service staff in the Lower Mainland, to provide cross-government program and access to information.	Detailed proposal for Deputy Ministers' review Detailed implementation plan System inplace	January 15/91 January 30/91 July 1/91	Isabel Kelly Deputy Minister Government Management Services
b) Program Guide to Government Develop a comprehensive, easily updated user-friendly guide to government programs.	Detailed action plan to Deputy Ministers Guide published	January 30/91 July 31/91	Bob Plecas Deputy Minister Regional and Economic Development (Government Agents Branch)
c) Create Community Service Quality Council A pilot in Fort St. John to establish a community focused, inter-ministry council to improve information sharing and access to government services at the local level.	Establish Council and hold first meeting Report progress to Deputy Ministers' Council If successful, expand to entire province within a year	January 30/91 March 31/91 March 31/92	Bob Plecas (Government Agents Branch)
d) Community Based Service Guide "Who Does What in Fort St. John" Develop a comprehensive community based service guide that compliments the program guide. The guide will include specific addresses, telephone numbers and services provided in the local community.	Guide in place If successful, at least 10 additional guides published across the province	March 31/91 March 31/92	Bob Plecas

Project/Priorities	Action	Due Date	Responsible
e) Develop Standard Revenue Collection Methods Through a B.C. Access Centre, pilot standard revenue collection methods, e.g., cross-government acceptance of credit cards, cash payments.	Detailed action plan to Deputy Ministers Implement in Nanaimo Report progress to Deputy Ministers' Council If successful, implement across province	January 30/91 February 15/91 August 15/91 November 1/91	Doug Horswill Deputy Minister Finance and Corporate Relations (Office of Comptroller General)
f) Improve Access for Persons with Physical Disabilities Improve service to challenged individuals, e.g., deaf, paraplegic, blind.	Modify facilities, forms and procedures, expose staff to Access 2000 and video on providing service to persons with disabilities	March 15/91	Chairman ADM, Committee on Social Policy
g) Use Plain Language Review statistical publications and releases to ensure the contents are understandable and accessible to a sophisticated lay person.	Review content, format and supporting materials in all releases. Promote materials to ensure potential users are aware of what is available	June 30/91	Doug Horswill (Planning and Statistics Division)
h) Innovative Use of Technology to Enhance Service B.C. Systems Corporation and the Science and Technology Team of Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, with selected ministries, to implement plan to expand direct service to the public through technology.	Detailed Action Plan to Deputy Ministers Report progress to Deputy Ministers' Council	February 15/91 June 30/90	Ted Evans CEO, BCSC Gary Mullins Deputy Minister Advanced Education, Training & Technology Isabel Kelly Government Management Services

2. LEAD WITH MINISTRY INITIATIVES

Many ministries have service quality projects underway. Led by line managers, they provide an opportunity to fine tune methodology, eliminate specific impediments to service quality, and demonstrate how government can improve the quality of service to the public.

Examples include:

a) Motor Vehicle Branch

A pilot in their Lower Mainland region to improve customer service through extended hours and locally developed policies and procedures.

b) Mineral Titles Branch

As part of the move of their Vancouver office, the branch is concentrating on improving service quality through the use of computer technology and other service quality measures.

c) Farm Extension Branch

Conducting customer research in partnership with Ministry of Finance Planning and Statistics Branch to ensure they meet their clients' needs.

d) Transportation and Highways

Six different district pilots to assess and implement new customer service strategies.

e) Child and Youth Secretariat

This project is intended to improve the provision of services to children through inter-ministry coordination.

f) Government Agents

Six Government Agent offices reviewing what level of authority required to improve service at local level.

g) Land Titles

Developing a service plan and using technology to provide enhanced service.

Project/Priorities	Action	Due Date	Responsible
3. PROVIDE TRAINING NECESSARY TO IMPROVE SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC			
a) Ministry Training Plans Individual ministries to have in place training programs to provide: • ministry orientation, • knowledge required for effective, program delivery, and • customer service skills.	Plans in place	April 1/91	All Deputy Ministers
b) Service Quality Training Guidelines Service quality training and education guidelines to be developed to assist ministries in training front-line staff, supervisors and management. To include: • training the trainers, • entry level orientation, • skills for front-line staff, e.g., telephone answering, and • service quality leadership skills for supervisors and managers, including executives.	Detailed action plan to Deputy Ministers First modules	January 30/91 March 31/91	Isabel Kelly (Centre for Executive and Management Development)
c) Celebrate Success The Service Quality B.C. Secretariat to organize a spring showcase following the model of the November session.		March 15/91	Brian Marson Service Quality B.C. Secretariat Chairman

Project/Priorities	Action	Due Date	Responsible
d) Profile the Small Wins The Service Quality B.C. Secretariat, in cooperation with ministry service quality coordinators, to compile a list of "1001" small wins government wide and distribute to ministries. Emphasis to be placed on regional wins.	Publish pamphlet	June 30/91	Brian Marson
4. INCREASE DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY			
a) Enterprise Model (Special Operating Agency) The Enterprise Model output oriented budgeting method to be developed and demonstrated by select agencies.	Formal submission to Treasury Board	January 30/91	Isabel Kelly (Purchasing Commission)
	Implementation	April 1/91	Robert Edwards Q.C. Deputy Attorney General Public Trustee
	Adoption by additional selected agencies	April 1/92	Respective Deputy Ministers Recommended agencies include: Royal British Columbia Museum Safety Engineering Services Land Title Branch Ministry of Parks Vital Statistics Branch
b) Negotiate Memoranda of Understanding Central agencies, in partnership with individual ministries, to negotiate ministry-specific memoranda of understanding which provide for increased delegated authority in financial, personnel, administrative and communications management, and increased ministry accountability for achieving performance objectives.	All ministries to review relationships with central agencies in order to negotiate MOU	June 30/91	Deputy Ministers
	Initial completed MOU to include Attorney General, Regional and Economic Development, Government Management Services and Transportation and Highways	July 1/91	Respective ministry and central agency Deputy Ministers
	Memoranda signed by all ministries	March 31/92	Deputy Ministers

Project/Priorities	Action	Due Date	Responsible
c) Expenditure Approvals Treasury Board Staff to review approval limits with SFO Council and recommend increases where appropriate.		January 30/91	Doug Horswill
d) Other Treasury Board Staff, OCG, with SFO Council, to review the materiality of other approval requirements (e.g., TBS 200s, section 22 accounts and intergovernmental agreements) and recommend their use on a more regular basis to Treasury Board.		January 30/91	Doug Horswill
e) Building Management Selected ministries and B.C. Buildings Corporation to pilot greater regional delegation of authority to regional and local managers in ministries and the corporation.		March 31/91	Dennis Truss CEO, BCBC Robert Edwards Q.C. Krysia Strawcynski Deputy Minister of Health
f) Internal Ministry Delegation Ministries to review their internal financial, personnel, administrative and communications policy, practices and approval matrices and push decision making down to the level directly responisble.	Initial progress report from Attorney General, Regional & Economic Development, Government Management Services and Transportation and Highways to Council of Deputies	March 31/91	Robert Edwards Q.C. Bob Plecas Isabel Kelly Vince Collins
5. RECOGNISE THE VALUE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS			
a) Front line service delivery positions/classifications to be reviewed to ensure adequate recognition and weighting is given to service delivery competencies.	Specific action plan to Deputy Ministers' Council Progress report	January 30/91 June 30/91	Chairman Personnel Services Council

Project/Priorities	Action	Due Date	Responsible
b) Recommendations dealing with the broad based expressions of concern about the inadequacies of the current management classification system to be brought forward for Deputy Ministers' Council review.	Specific action plan to Deputy Ministers' Council Progress report	January 30/91 June 30/90	Doug Horswill (GPSD)
c) Endorse GPSD's plan for an automated classification information system with remote access capability, to be developed for government wide use.	Plan to Deputy Ministers' Council Progress report	March 31/91 June 30/91	Doug Horswill (GPSD)
6. MAKE SERVICE QUALITY MATTER			
a) Develop a management performance planning, review and reward system which gives appropriate emphasis to promoting and supporting the management practices embodied within a customer focused organization.	Detailed action plan to Council of Deputy Ministers Progress report	February 15/91 June 30//91	Doug Horswill (GPSD)
b) GPSD and ministry personnel directors redevelop the performance review format for included employees incorporating criteria for evaluating service to internal and/or external customers.	Detailed action plan to Council of Deputy Ministers Progress report	January 30/91 June 30/91	Chairman, Personnel Council (to include all personnel directors and GPSD)
7. ENSURE SUPPORTIVE PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT POLICIES			
a) Northern Staffing and Retention Recommended that the Inter-ministry Northern Recruitment Committee Report (May 1990) on the recruitment and retention of employees in hard-to-recruit locations be implemented.	Recommendations be brought forward for next round of collective bargaining as primary management issue		Doug Horswill (GPSD)
b) New FTE Monitoring Procedures Recommended that the consultants' report on the simplification of the systems used to monitor and report FTE usage, prepared for the SFO Council (June 1990), be implemented.	Recommendations to Treasury Board Implementation	January 30/91 March 31/91	Doug Horswill (TBS)

Project/Priorities	Action	Due Date	Responsible
8. BUILD RESPONSIVE CENTRAL AGENCIES			
a) Facilities Project Management B.C. Buildings Corporation with selected ministries to pilot a project management approach to new facilities where all corporate involvement in the facility (marketing, development, administration, real estate and property management) is managed by a single project manager with full authority to act as the sole ministry contact.	Progress report to Council of Deputy Ministers Adopt government wide	July 15/91 August 15/91	Dennis Truss CEO, BCBC Bob Plecas Robert Edwards Q.C.
b) Market Approach to Facilities Management B.C. Buildings Corporation to explore the feasibility of operating in a competitive environment in some aspects of its mandate, e.g., maintenance, management of stand alone, single purpose units.	Recommendations to Deputy Ministers' Council	February 28/91	Dennis Truss
c) Regional Systems Maintenance B.C. Systems Corporation and Purchasing Commission, in partnership with ministries, to pilot a regional approach to the: • maintenance and repair of network systems and equipment, • provision of technology training, • hands-on support of front line staff in the use of this equipment.	Select ministries Develop detailed action plan Report on progress to Deputy Ministers' Council Implement province wide	January 15/91 February 15/91 August 15/91 September 15/91	Ted Evans CEO, BCSC Isabel Kelly (Purchasing Commission)
d) Value Added Vehicle Management Vehicle Management Branch, Purchasing Commission to address all significant issues identified by ministry clients and propose new, customer responsive services.	Detailed action plan	June 30/91	Isabel Kelly (Purchasing Commission)

Project/Priorities	Action	Due Date	Responsible
9. MONITOR PROGRESS			
a) A report to be prepared summarizing the progress and success of the various pilots, and recommendations for the future.	Report to Council of Deputy Ministers	March 31/91	Task Force and Secretariat Chairpersons

APPENDIX
SUMMARY AND ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL VISITS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two months, extensive consultations have been held with regional line staff and managers, ministry executive committees and central agencies, focusing on the quality of customer service. Each group was asked to identify the opportunities they see for improving customer service, as well as the impediments they currently face. The emphasis was on serving the public - government's external customers and clients - and those people within government who directly assist the public - our internal customers.

OBSERVATIONS

Consultation with ministry executive committees and front-line staff demonstrated the need for improved customer and client service, and highlighted areas for attention. But it also revealed that there is enthusiastic support for service quality across government. More specifically there is:

1. A willingness and commitment on the part of ministries to make service quality happen.

2. Recognition that a focus on the customer and continuous feedback is crucial to all service quality undertakings. The public's expressed needs and expectations must drive changes in the way government does business, not government's assumptions about what the public requires.

3. Recognition that implementing service quality includes doing the little things right. The regional consultations highlighted that a pat on the back, a new headset for a telephone operator, a sign pointing to the washroom - the 1001 things which are beyond the scope of this plan - are what really make service quality.

4. Recognition that **people** make service quality happen. There is a need throughout our human resource management practices (recruitment, classification, performance assessment, promotion, recognition and reward) for service quality and its management to be incorporated and made to matter. An important component is an ongoing commitment to service quality training as well as skills training and management development in general. Staff training and development is not a luxury but a necessity if the culture change is to come about through employees having the competencies necessary to ensure that customers and clients receive exceptional service.

5. A need for central agencies to establish partnerships with their ministry counterparts to foster more of a "value-for-money" approach to financial, human resource, and administrative management. The Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations' internal "Partners In Performance" approach is an example. To do this effectively, central agencies should strengthen their staffs by hiring or seconding more senior, experienced field and program managers.

6. A requirement that ministry policy and practices should not provide for, or result in, one standard for headquarters and another for regional operations. They should allow for uniform quality of service excellence across the ministry.

7. A need for a reorientation in central agency controls and rules enforcement from broad-brush measures to selective measures based on earned ministry accountability and responsibility.

8. A need for adoption of output-oriented budget systems especially by those agencies which recover expenditures or receive revenues. This will most successfully be achieved when monopoly situations are eliminated.

9. A need for restructuring of the communications planning and review process to provide ministries greater flexibility and authority to publish straightforward information pieces, as opposed to politically sensitive material.

10. A major role for technology in supporting front line staff, speeding delivery of information and providing remote and 24-hour access to services and information, often without staff intervention.

11. Recognition that adopting a customer-focused service quality culture and sustaining that commitment is easier in small or apparently smaller organizations than in larger ones. Key ingredients are clarity of mission/function, a sense of identity with the customer and an empowerment and accountability of staff for the success of that "enterprise". Managing via "Strategic Business Units" which drives down this "enterprise" model to smaller entities within the larger whole epitomize this approach.

12. Recognition that government increasingly delivers direct service to the public through the day-to-day action of third parties (e.g., schools, hospitals, private sector contractors). Ministries responsible must increasingly identify and implement mechanisms which extend service quality accountability to these third parties. Essential ingredients include mutually agreed definitions and measurement of these service standards along with consequential actions to reduce/remove disparities in performance.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

The provincial government is the largest employer in the province, providing service in every field of endeavour at over 3,000 locations. Given its size and complexity, there will always be room for improvement. But the B.C. public sector has a well deserved reputation for adaptability, flexibility and sound management. Consultations with line staff and ministry executives highlighted several commonly viewed areas where improvements could be made, in order to provide even better service to the public.

Highlights include:

Access to Information

Government can appear maze-like. For the public trying to obtain information or access to services, it can be a frustrating experience. The situation is characterized by:

- often confusing public and government telephone directories;

- ministry names which do not convey their function (e.g., fishing licences are not distributed through the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Vital Statistics Branch deals with births, deaths and marriages, not econometrics);

- information which is only available by calling long distance at the caller's expense;

- toll free lines which are so popular waits can be as long as 45 minutes;

- a lack of provincial and local program information for both the public and the staff who are asked to provide it;

- a lack of plain English (or the appropriate language) in forms and brochures, and duplication of forms;

- too often, poor signage in offices;

- office hours which do not correspond with when customers require or want the service; and

- limited use of innovative technology to provide the public with direct access to information, including during non-government hours of operation and without the intervention of government staff (BC Online, Teleplan and BC Business Network are notable exceptions).

Inadequately Prepared Front-line Staff

At odds with the concept of providing exceptional customer service, government frequently assigns its most junior, inexperienced, and poorly informed staff to customer and client contact positions. For example:

- Orientation and training for front-line staff is typically inadequate or non-existent. Unsupervised on-the-job training is too often the norm, to the frustration of staff/clients and customers who receive slow, ill-informed service.

- Regional disparities in training and inadequate delivery of training within the regions. Transportation costs quickly consume training dollars, short-changing staff in the north, for example.

- The undervaluing of "service to the public" competencies within the current classification system acts as an incentive for exceptional customer and client service staff to move on to more attractive supervisory and support positions because of the undervaluing of "service to the public" competencies within the current classification systems.

- Changes in programs and fee schedules are not communicated well to front-line staff. On occasion, customers and clients are better informed than the staff serving them due to lack of, or incomplete planning and management of, change.

Inconsistency Across Government

One of the greatest frustrations faced by government's clients and customers is the lack of a corporate view, resulting in the customer being "segmented" for the convenience of government's organizational structure. This is most clearly evident in the inconsistency across ministries in providing service. For example:

- There is no uniformity in the method of paying fees. Some programs provide for credit card payment, others insist on cash. Within ministries, certified cheques are required over a set amount by one program, a regular cheque by another program.

- Handicapped access is not universal.

- Internal to government there is a sharp difference in the level of understanding of rules and the flexibility afforded individual managers between those in Victoria and elsewhere in the province. The result is a dysfunctional organization with regional program delivery staff seemingly spending proportionately greater amounts of time on administrative matters than their Victoria counterparts.

Inadequate Tools to do the Job

Customer service suffers when staff do not have access to the necessary tools to do the job. In some cases, they have never been given the necessary tools; in other cases, the design and management of systems and equipment is inadequate. For example:

- As the result of program amalgamation, staff in several programs in government are required to use two or more incompatible computer systems simultaneously to complete a customer transaction.

- The continuing lack of qualified service companies across the province results in unacceptable downtime while computers and office equipment are maintained and repaired in Vancouver.

- Staff in some ministries believe their facilities do not adequately provide for confidentiality or an open welcoming atmosphere for their customers and clients.

Input-Oriented Budgeting

While staff and managers both agree with disciplined financial management, there is widespread frustration with the policy and impacts of input based budgeting. There are several dimensions to the issue:

- Revenue-generating agencies, and those whose demand is market-driven, or is a function of conditions beyond their control, are constrained by input controls, particularly on staffing.

- Sudden mid-year budget adjustments result in valuable time being spent on administration rather than client service.

Poorly Planned Communications

There is frustration at the line and management level with the communications planning and review process:

- Public Affairs Bureau review extends to publications such as campground maps and information pamphlets. On occasion they are only approved after the period when they are required by the public.

- Communications of program and policy changes to staff within and across ministries is "hit and miss".

- Few ministries have regular programs to solicit input and feedback from staff, suppliers and customers.

Control Versus Service Orientation

Government-wide central agencies and their headquarters counterparts within ministries over-emphasize control and pay insufficient attention to empowerment and delegation to those responsible for service delivery. The several dimensions of this include:

- Central agencies rely too heavily on the "shot-gun" approach of universal restrictions to control the sins of a few rather than "precision-rifling" with specific offenders. Ministries perceive that there is limited opportunity for them to negotiate less restrictive arrangements on an individual performance basis.

- Ministers are reluctant to delegate to their line management the full extent of the authority which government's central agencies have delegated to them.

- Financial and administrative actions taken by local offices are subject to duplicate, paper-intensive approvals at the local, regional, and headquarters levels.

- It is a generally held view that headquarters offices receive a disproportionate share of scarce FTE's at the expense of front line positions.

- There is generally inadequate investment in management development programs which emphasize team building, management through empowerment, and coaching for service excellence.

Cumbersome and/or Unresponsive Personnel Management Systems

Line managers, with whom the ultimate responsibility must rest for day-to-day management of the human resource, frequently cite both government-wide and ministry personnel management systems as barriers to overcome rather than as facilitators of program and service delivery. They cite:

- The need for less confrontational labour relations which will enable flexible arrangements to be reached in the face of emerging needs for change in program delivery to better serve the public (e.g., hours of work).

- Extended delays in processing of recruitment, appeals and classifications, directly affecting program/service delivery and not infrequently resulting in the loss of top candidates and/or high staff turnover. These were cited as particular problems in the north.

- The need for large investments of staff time and/or consulting dollars to prepare job descriptions and associated documents as the only avenue to guarantee any measure of success in obtaining reclassification.

- A management classification system and associated processes which are the subject of widespread concerns over:

  - classification slip at the 1 - 5 levels,

  - inappropriate rigidity at the 6 - 8 level, and

- classification/compensation bands that are too narrowly defined and do not permit the flexibility needed to respond to external market conditions within some employment sectors, resulting in inability to attract and retain qualified candidates.

- Management and staff performance planning and review processes which pay scant attention to managing and delivering exceptional customer service. As well, informal processes to recognize and reward exceptional service delivery by managers and staff are rare.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no need for lengthy planning or deliberations. The enthusiastic and large response to the November 20 Service Quality Showcase and the regional visits, the positive outlook taken by staff and executives in a climate of fiscal restraint, and the success of those organizations who have made service quality a priority, demonstrate that government's approach should be simply stated as "Just Do It!".

CHALLENGES

Ministry executive consultations provided an opportunity to discuss the practical implications of committing an organization to providing exceptional customer service. The benefits and rewards of service quality were evident. But all were candid and realistic about the very real challenges facing organizations adopting service quality:

- There is a need for strong sponsorship from senior management.

- Management must be willing to simply go ahead and do it despite perceived impediments and restraints.

- Service quality cannot be a quick fix; the groundwork and framework of service quality can be laid down in a relatively short period but fine-tuning is a three to five-year process; in fact, a continuous process of evaluation and reworking.

- Introducing service quality means making lasting change in the organization's culture and structure. This can be potentially threatening and confusing to staff and management accustomed to a different way of doing business.

- Managing in the service quality environment can be more challenging because uncertainty, flexibility, experimentation, risk-taking and learning from failures are encouraged.

- Tough decisions in the face of hard choices are still required of management.

- A systematic approach to service quality is required to ensure its efficient and effective implementation.

- During the first six months to a year of such an approach, the service quality focus will force management to face a number of tough questions that are not easy to deal with (e.g., how decisions are made in the organization, what are the "untouchable" policies and procedures).